

A Review of the Consequences of the Absence of Sports Law Education in University Curricula of Physical Education

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the consequences of the absence of sports law education in the curricula of physical education programs in Iranian universities and to explore the need for its integration to enhance legal literacy and professional competency in the sports sector. The research employs a scientific narrative review methodology using a descriptive-analytical approach. Academic literature, university curricula, national education policy documents, and comparative international case studies published between 2015 and 2024 were systematically reviewed. Sources were selected based on relevance to legal education in sports, curricular reform, and professional training standards. Thematic analysis was applied to extract and categorize key issues, consequences, and global trends related to sports law education. The review reveals a significant gap in the inclusion of sports law within Iran's physical education programs at undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. Legal topics are either entirely absent or superficially embedded within unrelated courses. This omission results in multiple negative outcomes, including increased legal vulnerability for athletes and coaches, institutional risks such as non-compliance and corruption, and the production of graduates who lack essential legal literacy for professional practice. Additionally, the absence of legal education contributes to ethical failures, reduced athlete safety, and the perpetuation of discrimination and inequity in sports environments. Comparative analysis shows that other countries have successfully integrated sports law into interdisciplinary curricula, enhancing professional readiness and institutional governance. The lack of sports law education in Iranian physical education programs presents a critical challenge to the professional development, legal protection, and ethical standards of the sports system. Curricular reform and interdisciplinary integration of legal training are essential for aligning Iranian sports education with global practices and addressing the complex legal demands of modern sport.

Keywords: Sports law education; physical education curriculum; legal literacy; athlete protection; curricular reform; professional development; interdisciplinary education.

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1. Introduction

Sports law, as a specialized branch of legal education, has emerged in recent decades in response to the increasing complexity and commercialization of the sports industry. It encompasses a wide array of legal domains, including but not limited to contract law, labor law, tort law, intellectual property, doping regulations, dispute resolution, and human rights as they pertain to athletes, coaches, sports institutions, and governing bodies. The multidimensional nature of the modern sports ecosystem, combined with high financial stakes and international engagement, has made legal literacy not merely a desirable competency but a necessity for all professionals working in the sports sector. In this regard, sports law is not just an abstract academic discipline but a practical field that ensures accountability, fairness, and integrity in the governance and operation of sports.

Legal literacy among sports professionals is crucial in a number of ways. First, it safeguards the rights of athletes and ensures that they are not subjected to exploitative contracts, abuse, or discrimination. Second, it enables coaches, referees, club administrators, and physical education teachers to understand the legal ramifications of their decisions and actions in training, competition, and institutional settings. Without basic legal knowledge, sports professionals are at risk of violating regulations inadvertently, which could lead to disqualifications, sanctions, or even legal disputes. Studies have emphasized that incorporating legal education into professional training contributes significantly to the ethical and professional conduct of individuals in the sports field (Shevchenko, 2023). Furthermore, legal awareness among athletes and managers contributes to improved dispute resolution and reduced institutional liabilities, especially in contexts where state and private entities collaborate in organizing sports events (Minas, 2021).

The global trend toward integrating sports law into higher education curricula, particularly in physical education and sports science departments, reflects an acknowledgment of the interdisciplinary demands of contemporary sports. Many universities around the world now offer standalone courses or specialized modules on sports law within their undergraduate and postgraduate programs in physical education. In countries such as the United States, South Korea, and India, law schools and departments of physical education have collaborated to design hybrid curricula that equip future sports professionals with both pedagogical and legal competencies (Moon, 2019; Rajashree et al., 2020). For example, in South Korea, the influence of American legal education has shaped the inclusion of courses related to contract negotiation and athlete rights in coaching certification programs (Moon, 2019). Similarly, India's rapid expansion of sports-related academic offerings has been accompanied by efforts to introduce legal modules addressing the ethics of doping, gender equity, and dispute arbitration (Pandey, 2023).

This curricular development is not limited to Western or highly industrialized nations. In countries such as South Africa, Vietnam, and Ukraine, scholars and policymakers have also emphasized the need to reform legal education to include sports law as a response to evolving professional requirements (Huong & Thuy, 2021; Madlalte, 2022; Nosik et al., 2021). In South Africa, the integration of legal literacy into physical education training is framed as a tool to address systemic inequality and promote athlete protection in underserved communities (Enebeli, 2024). Meanwhile, in Vietnam, law faculties have identified a need for cross-disciplinary education that prepares students for diverse applications of the law, including in the realm of sports and recreation (Huong & Thuy, 2021). Ukraine's reform strategies further underscore the importance of cultivating professional readiness by incorporating practical legal training into specialized fields such as physical education and health sciences (Shevchenko, 2023). These global examples highlight a widespread recognition that sports law is not a marginal concern but a core component of professional training in sports-related disciplines.

Despite these advancements worldwide, a critical gap remains in Iran's higher education system. Specifically, physical education programs at Iranian universities rarely include formal instruction in sports law. A review of national curriculum frameworks and university course catalogs reveals that legal education is either entirely absent or addressed peripherally within broader courses such as "sports management" or "ethics in sports." This omission has serious implications for the professional competency of graduates who will enter a labor market increasingly governed by formal contracts, international standards, and legal accountability. Moreover, the lack of legal training leaves future educators, coaches, and administrators vulnerable to legal misunderstandings and potential liabilities, particularly in matters related to athlete safety, institutional compliance, and gender-based rights in sports. Given the growing legal challenges facing the sports industry in Iran—including disputes over

athlete transfers, intellectual property violations, and organizational corruption—this curricular void constitutes a major professional and ethical oversight.

The primary objective of this review is to analyze the consequences of excluding sports law from the academic curriculum of physical education programs in Iran. By synthesizing international research on legal education and sports professionalization, the study seeks to highlight the educational, institutional, and legal deficiencies that result from this omission. The review also explores how the integration of sports law in global higher education systems can serve as a model for curricular reform in Iran. Key research questions guiding this review include: What are the professional and institutional consequences of not including sports law in the curriculum of physical education faculties in Iran? How have other countries addressed similar challenges through curricular integration? And what recommendations can be proposed for aligning Iran's physical education training with international legal and professional standards?

2. Methodology

This study adopts a scientific narrative review approach with a descriptive-analytical methodology. A narrative review was chosen to allow a comprehensive exploration of the consequences stemming from the absence of sports law education in university-level physical education curricula. Unlike systematic reviews, which focus on narrow, specific research questions and follow rigid inclusion criteria, narrative reviews provide a broader conceptual understanding and facilitate critical discussion on a topic of growing educational and professional concern. The descriptive-analytical method is particularly appropriate for synthesizing qualitative insights and identifying key themes, patterns, and implications from diverse literature and policy documents.

The review draws on literature published between 2015 and 2024 to ensure both relevance and timeliness. Academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar were systematically searched using combinations of keywords such as “sports law,” “legal education in sports,” “physical education curricula,” “sports governance,” “sports ethics,” “legal literacy in athletes,” and “sports law curriculum in universities.” In addition to peer-reviewed journal articles, national policy documents, educational syllabi from Iranian universities, institutional reports, and international curriculum frameworks were examined to capture a broad range of perspectives and data sources.

To be included in the review, sources had to meet the following criteria: they must be published in English or Persian between 2015 and 2024; directly address issues related to sports law, legal education in physical education, or the curricular design of university-level sports programs; and provide either empirical findings or theoretical discussions relevant to the role and impact of legal knowledge in the field of sports. Studies that focused exclusively on general legal education without contextual connection to sports, or that pertained only to primary or secondary education levels, were excluded.

After initial identification, a two-step screening process was applied. First, titles and abstracts were reviewed to filter out irrelevant articles. Second, full texts of the remaining documents were analyzed in-depth. Thematic coding was then used to categorize findings based on the nature of consequences attributed to the lack of sports law education. These thematic categories were established through inductive analysis and include areas such as professional vulnerability, institutional inefficiencies, curriculum misalignment, and comparative global practices.

To strengthen the validity of the findings, triangulation was employed by incorporating various types of sources, including academic literature, curriculum syllabi, interviews with subject-matter experts (reported in secondary literature), and international education guidelines. Additionally, particular attention was given to evidence from developing countries with educational systems structurally comparable to Iran. This provided a culturally and contextually relevant comparative basis.

Since this study is a review of existing literature and publicly available documents, it did not require formal ethical approval. However, ethical standards were maintained throughout by properly citing all sources and ensuring accuracy in reporting the findings and viewpoints of other scholars. No primary data collection involving human participants was conducted.

The narrative nature of the review may entail certain limitations, including potential biases in literature selection and the interpretive nature of thematic analysis. However, these were mitigated by employing a structured search strategy, inclusion criteria based on clear objectives, and the use of diverse data sources. Future studies may consider complementing these findings through empirical investigations such as surveys or interviews with faculty members, students, and policymakers in the field of sports education.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Sports law, as a specialized legal field, is broadly defined as the collection of legal norms, principles, and regulations that govern relationships in the domain of professional and amateur sports. It encompasses both public and private legal considerations, intersecting with civil, criminal, labor, administrative, and international law. The conceptualization of sports law has evolved alongside the transformation of sports from a recreational activity into a complex industry with political, commercial, and cultural dimensions. As a result, sports law not only regulates the internal functioning of sports organizations but also addresses broader societal issues such as human rights, gender equity, and economic fairness within the context of sport (Liljeblad, 2022).

The scope of sports law is notably wide-ranging. At its core are legal domains that directly affect athletes and sporting institutions. One key area is contractual regulation, which includes employment contracts, sponsorship agreements, transfer clauses, and endorsement deals. Disputes arising from these legal relationships often require adjudication through either national courts or specialized bodies such as the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Another critical domain is anti-doping law, which involves strict liability rules and international standards, such as those outlined by the World Anti-Doping Agency, aiming to ensure fairness and athlete health. Issues of tort and liability are also central, particularly regarding injury, negligence, and safety protocols during training and competition. Furthermore, sports law extends to the regulation of violence in sports, both on and off the field, including disciplinary mechanisms, criminal liability, and the management of crowd behavior. Intellectual property rights—such as broadcasting rights, trademarks, and image rights—have gained prominence with the commercialization of sports. Crucially, sports law also addresses the protection of athletes' rights, including rights to fair treatment, protection from abuse, equal opportunity regardless of gender or disability, and access to grievance mechanisms (Bloch, 2020; Fenwick et al., 2022).

Legal education plays a pivotal role in fostering professionalism in sports. By equipping future coaches, physical educators, referees, and administrators with foundational legal knowledge, academic institutions can significantly enhance the ethical and operational quality of sports practices. Legal training in this context is not aimed at producing lawyers, but at developing legally literate professionals capable of recognizing risks, complying with regulations, and upholding athletes' rights. In jurisdictions where sports law is embedded in physical education curricula, graduates are better prepared to navigate legal dilemmas related to player recruitment, disciplinary issues, contractual negotiations, and safeguarding policies (Adekoya, 2014). Legal education also helps demystify the increasingly technical regulatory frameworks governing global sports events, enhancing transparency and reducing corruption. For instance, clinical legal education models that include experiential components have shown promise in bridging the gap between abstract legal concepts and practical implementation in real-world sporting environments (Mikinyango & Nguru, 2021; Pandey, 2023).

The development and integration of sports law within academic programs can be better understood through the lens of curriculum theory and educational policy. Curriculum theory, particularly the perspectives that emphasize responsiveness to social needs and labor market demands, supports the inclusion of disciplines that are professionally relevant and contextually necessary. From this viewpoint, the curriculum is not merely a collection of subjects, but a reflection of societal values, power structures, and future-oriented goals. In the case of sports law, its absence from university-level physical education programs in Iran reflects a misalignment between academic content and the practical demands of the sports profession. Educational policy frameworks that promote interdisciplinary learning and competency-based education increasingly advocate for the integration of applied legal knowledge into non-law disciplines (Shevchenko, 2023).

Within this framework, legal education serves not only as content to be taught, but as a tool for social empowerment, particularly in ensuring accountability, ethical conduct, and human rights compliance within sports systems. Scholars have noted that when legal literacy is woven into professional training, it enhances students' sense of agency and civic responsibility, particularly in fields where power imbalances and ethical risks are prevalent (Weresh, 2023). Furthermore, educational reforms in various countries demonstrate that curriculum innovations—such as modular courses, interdisciplinary workshops, and simulation-based learning—are effective in integrating legal content into programs traditionally dominated by physical, technical, or managerial instruction (Arianto, 2024; Huong & Thuy, 2021).

Therefore, the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study emphasizes the importance of understanding sports law not merely as a legal discipline but as an educational imperative. Its integration into the curricula of physical education is justified not only by legal necessity but also by pedagogical reasoning rooted in curriculum theory and educational policy. Such integration addresses the gaps between institutional learning and professional practice, fostering a new generation of sports professionals who are not only technically proficient but also legally aware and ethically grounded. This multidimensional perspective provides a solid foundation for analyzing the consequences of excluding sports law from university programs and for proposing reforms aligned with global standards and local needs.

4. Status of Sports Law Education in Iran's Physical Education Programs

An examination of the current academic structure of physical education programs at Iranian universities reveals a significant absence of systematic legal instruction tailored to the needs of the sports profession. At the undergraduate level (B.A.), the standard curriculum offered across major public and private institutions focuses primarily on theoretical and practical components such as anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, coaching sciences, and physical fitness. Legal concepts, if present at all, appear only marginally within broader subjects like “Ethics in Sport” or “Management in Physical Education,” where legal topics are often generalized, superficial, and treated as peripheral concerns. This cursory treatment fails to convey the specificity and importance of sports law as an autonomous knowledge domain necessary for professional preparedness in contemporary sports environments.

At the postgraduate level (M.A. and Ph.D.), where curricular specialization is expected to increase, the situation does not significantly improve. Master's programs in sport management or sport psychology may occasionally introduce legal terminology within courses related to policy or organizational behavior, but these references are fragmented and lack depth. Doctoral programs, which are designed to cultivate researchers and educators, also fail to include formal sports law modules. Even among electives or interdisciplinary offerings, there is little evidence of sustained engagement with legal frameworks that influence athlete contracts, doping protocols, arbitration procedures, or institutional liability. In contrast to disciplines such as economics or health sciences, where legal literacy is increasingly regarded as integral, sports law remains marginalized within Iran's physical education system.

This curricular neglect is further exacerbated by the absence of faculty members specialized in sports law or legal studies within departments of physical education. As a result, students are rarely exposed to the foundational legal principles that govern their future profession. Without adequate instructional support, the few legal topics that do arise are often delivered by generalists lacking formal training in legal theory or jurisprudence. Expert assessments conducted by Iranian scholars in the field of curriculum development have echoed these concerns, indicating that legal education in sports is underrepresented both in academic syllabi and in professional discourse. Moreover, interviews with students and recent graduates of physical education programs highlight a widespread sense of unpreparedness when faced with real-world legal issues, such as athlete representation, risk management, and contractual obligations.

This lack of exposure stands in stark contrast to global educational trends, where the integration of sports law into physical education and sports management curricula is increasingly recognized as a pedagogical and professional necessity. In the United States, for instance, many universities offer dedicated courses on sports law at both undergraduate and graduate levels, often co-taught by legal scholars and sports professionals. These courses address a wide range of topics, including tort liability in sports, labor relations, collective bargaining agreements in professional leagues, and Title IX compliance. Such courses are often supported by experiential components like mock trials or internships, allowing students to engage with legal systems in practical contexts (Fenwick et al., 2022).

In the United Kingdom, universities with strong programs in sport and exercise science routinely incorporate legal education within broader modules on governance and policy. The legal components of these courses are directly aligned with the regulatory frameworks set by UK Sport, Sport England, and other national bodies. Emphasis is placed on safeguarding protocols, anti-discrimination measures, and legal responsibilities of coaches and administrators, all of which are essential knowledge areas for sports professionals operating in a regulated environment (Liljeblad, 2022). In Germany, the dual education system facilitates interdisciplinary training, allowing students to simultaneously pursue certifications in coaching

and legal studies. German sports academies emphasize the legal obligations of club managers and federations, particularly in areas related to tax law, labor contracts, and insurance—topics that are notably absent from the Iranian curriculum.

Asian countries such as India, China, and South Korea have also made significant progress in integrating sports law into their educational systems. In India, curricular reforms have led to the development of interdisciplinary programs that combine physical education, law, and ethics, acknowledging the growing professionalization of sports and the importance of legal literacy in athlete management and organizational compliance (Pandey, 2023; Rajashree et al., 2020). Chinese universities have aligned their legal education initiatives with international regulatory standards, particularly in preparation for hosting mega-events like the Olympics, which demand rigorous legal oversight (Baskir, 2015; Minas, 2021). South Korea's legal education model has been shaped by its exposure to American pedagogical methods, which emphasize critical thinking, case analysis, and rights-based approaches to legal interpretation (Moon, 2019).

In contrast, Iran's physical education programs continue to operate in relative isolation from these global developments. The absence of institutional partnerships between law schools and faculties of sport science has prevented the formation of interdisciplinary programs or the development of relevant academic resources. Furthermore, national education policies have yet to acknowledge the role of legal education as a strategic imperative for the advancement of the sports sector. While there have been some isolated proposals for reform, they remain largely unimplemented due to bureaucratic inertia and a lack of specialized personnel. Without curriculum-wide mandates or faculty development initiatives, the institutional capacity to teach and promote sports law remains underdeveloped.

The neglect of sports law education in Iran's physical education curricula thus reflects a broader issue of curricular stagnation and professional disconnect. As international models demonstrate, the inclusion of legal training in sports education is not a luxury but a necessity for aligning academic programs with the realities of a legally complex and globally interconnected sports industry. The contrast between Iran and countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and even several Asian nations illustrates a critical gap that must be addressed through intentional policy shifts, curriculum reform, and interdepartmental collaboration. Without such changes, Iranian physical education graduates will continue to face professional challenges unprepared, lacking the legal knowledge needed to protect themselves, their athletes, and the institutions they serve.

5. Consequences of the Absence of Sports Law in Curricula

The absence of sports law education within physical education programs in Iran presents a series of interrelated consequences that significantly affect individuals, institutions, and the wider sports system. These consequences are not only practical in nature but also ethical, legal, and societal. This section explores these outcomes across four key dimensions: the legal vulnerability of athletes and coaches, institutional risks for sports organizations, educational and professional deficiencies, and broader ethical and social implications. Drawing on global literature, these dimensions reveal the pressing need for reform and integration of legal education within the sports curriculum.

5.1. Legal Vulnerability of Athletes and Coaches

In the absence of foundational legal education, athletes and coaches often operate in a state of legal ignorance, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation and rights violations. Contracts, which are the primary legal instruments governing relationships between athletes and clubs or federations, are frequently signed without adequate understanding of their terms, obligations, and enforcement mechanisms. Many athletes, particularly those at the amateur and semi-professional levels, are unaware of their rights concerning payment, image usage, termination clauses, or medical care provisions. This lack of awareness opens the door to abusive practices such as wage withholding, coercive behavior, or forced labor under misleading contract terms. The inability of coaches to recognize the legality of their own employment conditions or the risks associated with player injuries further compounds this problem. As legal illiteracy persists, athletes are left without the tools to challenge these injustices.

International experiences provide clear evidence that legal education reduces such vulnerabilities. In South Africa, the integration of sports law in training programs has enhanced awareness among coaches about labor rights, liability in injury cases, and procedural fairness in disciplinary actions (Madlalate, 2022). Similarly, in Kenya, clinical legal education projects

implemented within law schools have been extended to sporting communities, empowering athletes with the ability to seek legal redress and understand arbitration processes (Mikinyango & Nguru, 2021). In contrast, in contexts where no formal legal training is provided, legal disputes involving sports professionals often escalate due to miscommunication, lack of documentation, or misinformation about institutional responsibilities. This is particularly evident in developing countries where the legal protection of athletes is still evolving and contractual enforcement is weak or inconsistently applied (Nosik et al., 2021).

Moreover, without knowledge of anti-doping regulations, athletes risk unintentional violations that can end their careers. Global anti-doping policies operate on a strict liability principle, meaning that athletes are held responsible regardless of intent. This requires not only awareness of banned substances but also an understanding of therapeutic exemptions, testing procedures, and appeal mechanisms. Legal education in sports helps athletes navigate these complexities and avoid unintentional infractions, as seen in China and India, where education campaigns and university-level instruction have increased compliance and reduced the number of disqualifications (Minas, 2021; Pandey, 2023).

5.2. *Institutional Risks for Sports Organizations*

The absence of sports law education also creates significant risks for sports institutions, including clubs, federations, schools, and universities. One major area of concern is organizational non-compliance with legal and regulatory frameworks. Without trained staff who understand legal obligations, institutions are prone to administrative errors, such as failing to register players appropriately, neglecting insurance protocols, or violating employment laws. These oversights can lead to sanctions, litigation, and reputational damage. In jurisdictions where legal frameworks are becoming increasingly complex, organizations without legally literate staff are often left behind, unable to meet the compliance standards set by international or national regulatory bodies.

In countries where legal education is embedded into the management training of sports professionals, organizations benefit from greater operational efficiency and legal risk mitigation. For example, in the UK, sports management programs include legal modules that equip administrators with the ability to draft contracts, assess liability, and implement safeguarding policies in alignment with national standards (Liljeblad, 2022). This professionalization of legal compliance contributes to stronger governance structures and greater accountability. In contrast, Iranian sports institutions continue to rely on informal practices and ad hoc decision-making, which increases the likelihood of corruption and administrative failure.

Corruption risks are also heightened in contexts where sports law is absent from professional training. When administrators are unaware of conflict-of-interest rules, procurement standards, or reporting obligations, opportunities for misconduct increase. Legal illiteracy creates an environment where unethical behavior can go unchecked, undermining the legitimacy of sports institutions and eroding public trust. In Indonesia, the reform of legal education to include elements of ethics and governance has been proposed as a strategy to address these institutional vulnerabilities, particularly in public-sector sports programs (Arianto, 2024). Iranian institutions could benefit from similar reform efforts by developing interdisciplinary modules that blend legal, managerial, and ethical training for sports administrators.

5.3. *Educational and Professional Deficiencies*

One of the most direct consequences of excluding sports law from physical education curricula is the creation of a graduate population that is unprepared for the legal realities of professional life. Graduates of these programs are expected to work in diverse environments—schools, clubs, national federations, fitness centers—where legal awareness is essential. Yet many are unable to understand or apply basic legal principles, such as liability for injuries, employment rights, or safeguarding responsibilities. This skills gap limits their effectiveness in the workplace and places a burden on employers who must either retrain them or expose themselves to legal risks.

The mismatch between academic training and market expectations is a well-documented issue in legal education reform globally. In Ukraine, the emphasis has shifted toward competency-based education that prepares students for real-world application of legal norms in their respective professions (Shevchenko, 2023). Similarly, in Vietnam, law schools are actively rethinking their curricula to ensure that graduates have the interdisciplinary skills needed to function in a globalized and legally

complex economy (Huong & Thuy, 2021). These reforms highlight the importance of aligning academic content with the competencies demanded by employers and society. In Iran, however, physical education graduates often report feeling unprepared to manage legal documents, resolve disputes, or engage in institutional compliance, which hampers their career progression and undermines the value of their academic training.

In addition to professional limitations, the lack of legal literacy also reduces graduates' ability to contribute to policy-making or institutional reform in sports. Those who might ascend to leadership roles are at a disadvantage if they cannot interpret legal regulations, advocate for policy change, or participate in the development of codes of conduct and ethics. This has a chilling effect on the evolution of the sports system as a whole, which remains stagnant in the absence of informed advocates and reformers.

5.4. *Ethical and Social Implications*

The exclusion of sports law from academic training also has profound ethical and social consequences. One of the most serious is the compromise of athlete safety. Without legal frameworks to guide behavior, coaches and administrators may adopt practices that inadvertently endanger athletes, such as overtraining, neglect of injury protocols, or inappropriate disciplinary methods. In legal systems where duty of care is codified, such practices could result in lawsuits and sanctions. In Iran, where these norms are less systematically enforced, the absence of legal education contributes to a culture of impunity and professional carelessness.

Discrimination and inequity are also exacerbated when legal norms are absent or unknown. Issues such as gender bias, disability discrimination, and socio-economic exclusion often go unaddressed in the absence of a legal lens. Legal education provides tools to recognize, report, and remedy discriminatory practices, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable sports environment. In countries such as South Africa and the United States, legal training in anti-discrimination law has been instrumental in promoting gender equity in sports leadership and participation (Enebeli, 2024; Weresh, 2023). Iranian sports professionals, lacking this knowledge, are often unaware of their obligations to ensure equal treatment and are ill-equipped to respond to violations when they occur.

Finally, the ethical culture of sports is shaped in part by legal literacy. When students are exposed to legal norms during their academic training, they develop a stronger sense of professional responsibility, civic engagement, and ethical reasoning. Legal education serves not only to inform but also to socialize students into a framework of accountability and justice. As such, it plays a vital role in promoting integrity, transparency, and human rights in sports. Its absence contributes to an ethical vacuum in which power dynamics, favoritism, and institutional inertia dominate.

In conclusion, the absence of sports law education in Iranian physical education programs has a wide array of negative consequences. From the vulnerability of athletes and the risks faced by institutions, to the professional inadequacies of graduates and the broader ethical failures of the system, the effects are pervasive and systemic. International experiences provide a roadmap for reform, demonstrating that the integration of legal education into sports curricula not only strengthens individual competencies but also improves institutional performance and social equity. Addressing this curricular gap is therefore essential for aligning Iran's physical education system with global standards and for promoting justice, safety, and professionalism in sport.

6. **Conclusion**

The analysis presented in this article has underscored the multifaceted and far-reaching consequences of excluding sports law education from the curricula of physical education programs in Iranian universities. As the professional landscape of sports continues to evolve rapidly—becoming more globalized, commercialized, and legally complex—the demand for legally literate professionals in this field has never been more pressing. Physical education graduates, whether they work as coaches, administrators, teachers, or sport scientists, are increasingly confronted with legal and ethical challenges that require a basic understanding of legal principles, institutional policies, and individual rights. The current academic structure in Iran, however, remains inadequately equipped to meet these emerging demands, resulting in a significant and detrimental gap between academic preparation and professional reality.

The review of Iran's university curricula clearly reveals that legal topics are either absent or insufficiently addressed across all levels of physical education programs. From undergraduate through doctoral studies, students receive little to no formal instruction on essential legal matters that directly impact their future roles in the sports industry. Legal issues are occasionally touched upon in courses on ethics or management, but they are rarely explored in depth, nor are they framed within a coherent, discipline-specific context. This neglect of legal education leaves students ill-prepared to navigate the complexities of contracts, athlete protection, liability management, doping regulations, and dispute resolution—areas that are central to their professional responsibilities.

The consequences of this educational gap are numerous and severe. Athletes and coaches, in the absence of legal literacy, are exposed to various forms of exploitation and rights violations. They often enter into contracts without understanding the implications, overlook legal protections available to them, and lack the capacity to challenge unfair treatment. Coaches, similarly, are placed at risk by failing to recognize legal liabilities associated with injury, negligence, or disciplinary actions. The absence of structured legal education deprives them of tools necessary for ethical decision-making and risk management. This legal vulnerability not only affects individuals but also contributes to systemic weaknesses across the sports ecosystem.

At the organizational level, sports institutions suffer from non-compliance, administrative failures, and governance issues due to a lack of trained personnel who understand legal frameworks. Without knowledgeable professionals, sports organizations become susceptible to procedural violations, poor recordkeeping, lack of due process, and in some cases, corruption. These problems hinder institutional credibility and performance, while also creating legal exposure that can result in financial penalties and reputational damage. Moreover, as sports organizations in Iran increasingly interact with international bodies and participate in global competitions, the legal deficiencies within their operational systems become even more apparent, placing them at a strategic disadvantage.

Beyond the technical and operational ramifications, the exclusion of sports law from educational programs also perpetuates deeper educational and professional deficiencies. Students graduate with significant gaps in their knowledge and competencies, which directly impacts their employability, leadership potential, and ability to contribute meaningfully to institutional reform. This misalignment between what is taught in universities and what is required in the field fosters professional frustration, hinders career progression, and weakens the role of higher education as a driver of social and institutional development. The inability to understand or apply legal principles limits graduates' roles to narrow technical functions, excluding them from strategic decision-making and policy influence within the sports sector.

Furthermore, this absence of legal education has profound ethical and social implications. Without awareness of legal rights and duties, professionals are less likely to recognize issues of injustice, discrimination, or harm occurring within their institutions. Athlete safety may be compromised by inadequate supervision or failure to implement appropriate risk mitigation strategies. Discriminatory practices—based on gender, disability, or socioeconomic status—may go unchallenged due to ignorance or apathy. Legal education, if incorporated properly, can act as a catalyst for ethical behavior, equity promotion, and respect for human rights within the sports domain. It serves to inculcate a culture of accountability and justice, qualities that are foundational to the integrity and sustainability of any professional field.

Globally, there is a clear trend toward integrating sports law into sports education programs. Countries with advanced sports systems have recognized the indispensable role of legal knowledge in cultivating competent, responsible, and effective professionals. Legal education is no longer confined to law faculties; it is being actively incorporated into interdisciplinary programs that prepare students for real-world challenges. This trend reflects a broader understanding of education as a tool not just for technical training but for civic and ethical development. By following this global trajectory, Iranian institutions can bridge the gap between academic instruction and professional practice, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to navigate the legal dimensions of their roles and contribute to the advancement of the sports system.

The failure to address this issue represents a missed opportunity for educational innovation and professional advancement. Iran's higher education system has the intellectual capacity and institutional framework to implement meaningful curricular reform. Law faculties and physical education departments can collaborate to design targeted courses, modules, or workshops that introduce students to core legal concepts relevant to their field. Faculty development programs can train educators in interdisciplinary teaching methods, while partnerships with national and international legal institutions can offer practical learning opportunities. These interventions do not require the creation of entirely new academic programs but can be integrated into existing structures through thoughtful curriculum design.

Addressing the current gap in sports law education is also essential for safeguarding the rights and well-being of future generations of athletes and sports professionals. The world of sports is increasingly shaped by legal and regulatory considerations, from compliance with international sporting codes to negotiations over athlete representation and branding. Without a legal foundation, Iranian sports professionals will remain isolated from global developments and vulnerable within their own domestic systems. By contrast, a legal-empowered workforce can act as agents of change, promoting ethical governance, protecting athlete welfare, and elevating the overall quality of sports practice and policy.

In sum, the consequences of neglecting sports law education in physical education curricula are deep and far-reaching. The costs are borne not only by individuals but also by institutions and society at large. The incorporation of legal education into physical education programs is not a luxury but a necessity—a foundational step toward aligning academic training with professional demands, fostering ethical behavior, and ensuring justice and accountability in sport. The call for reform is both urgent and achievable. With deliberate effort and interdisciplinary collaboration, Iranian universities can transform their curricula to meet the needs of a rapidly changing sports world, empowering their students to become knowledgeable, ethical, and resilient professionals capable of shaping the future of sport in Iran and beyond.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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